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GREENLAWN UPDATE:



Changes Under Way At The Old Plantation

by Micky Maroney

Ravaged by time and the elements, rooted to the spot where it was built one hundred thirty-eight years ago, Green Lawn stands forlornly, patiently awaiting its fate.

Vacant for over twenty years, but, until recently, still harboring many Otey family antiques, the house and remaining acreage are no longer owned by descendants of the builder. With development plans in the offing, the antiques were sold not long ago at an auction on the premises.

Green Lawn, built in 1850 by Madison Otey for his bride, Octavia Wyche, had remained in the family for generations. [See *Historic Huntsville Quarterly*, Fall/Winter 1985-86, p. 16, "The Oteys and Green Lawn."] The last descendant to live there

was Mrs. Leslie Cummins (Imogen). However, for the last twenty years she had been living in Tennessee with her daughter, Mrs. David Browder (Leslie).

When Mrs. Browder died suddenly in 1987, Mrs. Cummins, now in her 90's, went to California to live with her son John. Whatever their reasons, the Cummins decided to sell Green Lawn and the several hundred acres surrounding it.

It was sold last year to a local man who had plans to develop the property into commercial lots and housing subdivisions. Although not planning to restore Green Lawn himself, he wanted to keep the antique furniture with the house and was willing to sell the house and contents to someone inter-

ested in its restoration. Nevertheless, he recently sold the entire property to Huntsville contractor Jerry Atnip of Atnip Design and Supply Center, Inc.

Consequently, changes are occurring at the old plantation. It is located about a mile south of Meridianville, on the east side of U. S. Highway 231-431 North at Cummins Lane, slightly north of the now-closed Edwards Furniture store.

The Atnip's immediate thought upon acquiring the property was to demolish the house and proceed with development. However, the previous owner had given them a copy of the **Quarterly** relating Green Lawn's history, and they began to have second thoughts about the old house. Perhaps it could be used somehow in conjunction with their planned housing development.

After conferring with an out-of-town consultant, they were convinced that the house would make an elegant and historic centerpiece for the subdivision they intend to build nearby.

The Atnip company's plans are for the subdivision to be located to the rear of the Otey house, with the street entrance to be placed on the south side of the house where the old driveway entered the property. The company intends to construct fine homes in a subdivision which will include tennis courts on the site where the Cummins family once had their own tennis courts. In the area of the Cummins' former private golf

course, a community swimming pool will be built.

Plans for the near future call for the house to be made weather-tight, exterior repairs made, and gleaming white paint applied. The unattractive 1930's lean-to addition at the rear of the house will be removed. In its place, eventually, a screened and/or glassed-in porch area will be added. Interior repairs and redecorating will come at a later date, after which the company hopes to use the house for offices.

The underbrush surrounding the house has already been cleared away and the yard will soon be rehabilitated. The remaining old trees, large bushes, ancient flowers, and newly-sprouted green grass should produce a befitting landscape. Refurbished, too, will be the nearby graveyard where Madison and Octavia Otey and other family members are buried.

"Green Lawn," of course, was the first choice of names for the Atnip's residential development. But since there is another subdivision named "Green Lawn" nearby, the Atnips have chosen the name "Cummins Place."

So, the historic old house has been given a reprieve from demolition. In the foreseeable future, neither neglect nor deliberate human destruction will claim the once beautiful home. Perhaps in a short while, Octavia's house will be standing proudly once more, with hope for the future.